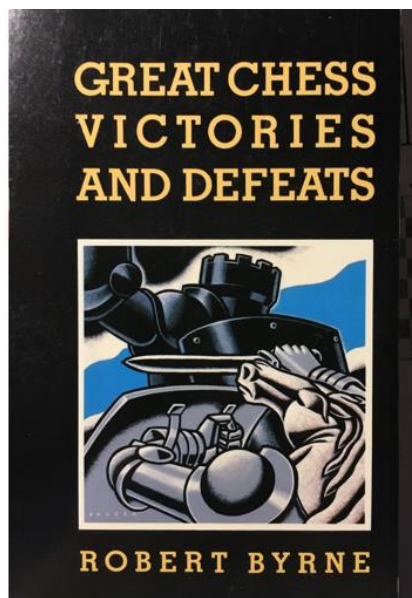


# Positional Decisions: Learning from Robert Byrne's Games

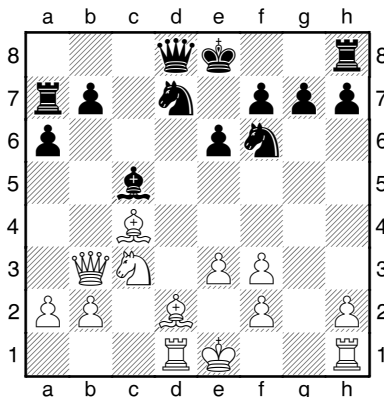


A model "positional" game featuring the 2♙'s and better 'position' according to Byrne. What is this better position, and why was it so important?

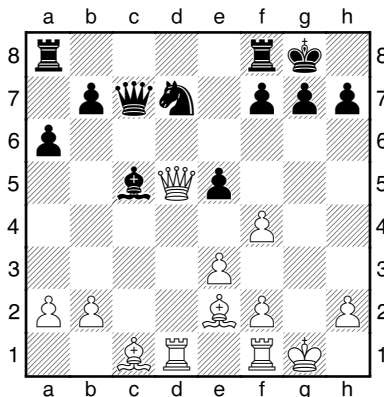
The pawn structure becomes unbalanced early on due to it being a QGA, and black inflicts a further unbalancing factor when he trades his ♘ for ♗. I think, however, that the major factor is play in the 5th quadrant. It is true that King Safety and Development will be relevant players. The key piece to watch is White's light-colored bishop. This analysis is based upon the first published article that Byrne wrote for Chess Life.

Let's have a look...

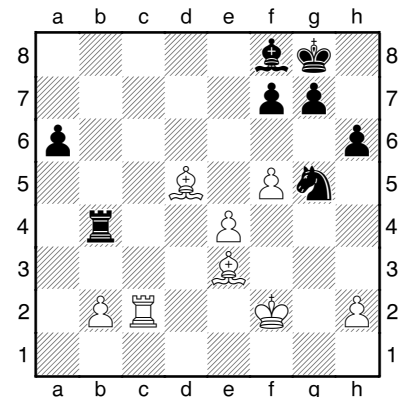
First. Challenge yourself to look at these positions:



11...♘b8-d7



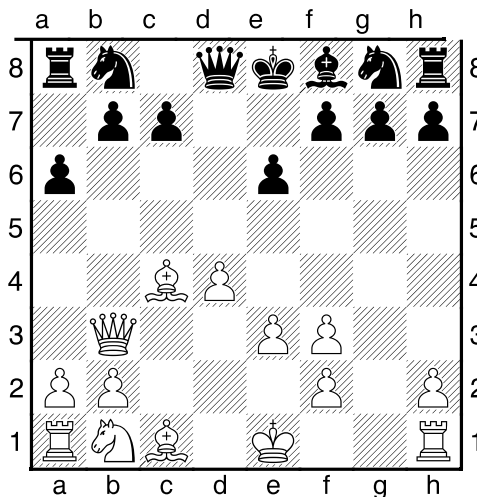
17.♙b3xd5



47...♖b3-b4

Byrne, Robert - Brasket, Curt [D22]  
Western Open, 07.1962

- 1.d4            d5
- 2.c4            dxc4
- 3.♘f3          a6
- 4.e3            ♗g4
- 5.♙xc4        e6
- 6.♙b3          ♘xf3
- 7.gxf3



- 7...♖a7 [Byrne prefers the game continuation (favored by Alekhine, Flohr, and Brasket(!) ... to 7...b5 often played by Smyslov, Bisguier, Lombardy, and Reshevsky.)
- 8.♘c3

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[Relevant: 8.♔e2 ♖f6 9.♗d2 c5 10.dxc5 ♕xc5 11.♖c2 ♗bd7 12.♗b3 ♕b4+ 13.♔f1 0-0 14.a3 ♕d6 15.♕d2 ♖a8 16.♗d1 ♖c8 17.♖b1 ♗e7 18.♗a5 ♗e5 19.f4 ♗c6 20.♗xc6 ♖xc6 21.♕f3 ♖b6 22.♖c2 e5 23.♖g1 e4 24.♕e2 ♗e6 25.♕c3 ♕e7 26.♖g5 ♗e8 27.♖g3 ♗f6 28.♔g2 ♖c8 29.♖g5 ♖b3 30.♖d2 h6 31.♖a5 ♗d6 32.♗e1 ♗d5 33.♕e5 ♖dd8 34.♖c1 ♗f6 35.♕d4 ♗e6 1-0 (35) Gligoric,S-Flohr,S Hastings 1962]

### 8...♗f6 9.♕d2

[White is not in a hurry. This is often the watchword in games where you have the 2♕ advantage. The ♕'s often lurk around (even at the side of the board). Slowly, after development takes place, then one opens up the game, preferably into two distinct pawns masses separated by at least two (preferably three) open files.]

### 9...c5

[Delaying this "freeing" advance is preferred. Only Brasket, who always was a very direct player, has played in this manner. See the two players below. One is a current candidate.]

[9...♗bd7 10.♗e4 (10.0-0 ♕e7 11.♔h1 0-0 12.♖g1 b5 13.♕e2 c5 14.♖g2 cxd4 15.exd4 g6 16.♗e4 ♗d5 17.f4 f5 18.♗g5 ♕xg5 19.fxg5 ♗7b6 20.f4 ♖d6 21.♖e1 ♖e8 22.♖f3 ♖c7 23.♕d1 ♗c4 24.♕c1 ♗cb6 25.♕b3 a5 26.a3 a4 27.♕a2 ♗c4 28.♖ge2 ♖c6 29.h4 ♗db6 30.♔h2 ♖d5 31.♖h3 ♖xd4 32.h5 ♗d5 33.♖f3 ♖d6 34.♔g3 ♗db6 35.hxg6 hxg6 36.♖h1 ♖g7 37.♖eh2 ♖ed8 38.♕xc4 ♗xc4 39.♖b7 ♖d3+ 40.♔f2 ♖3d7 41.♖xb5 ♖d4+ 42.♔g3 ♖d3+ 43.♔f2 ♖d4+ 44.♔g3 0-1 (44) Byrne,R-Fajans,H Pittsburgh 1946) 10...♕e7 11.♕c3 0-0 12.♖g1 b5 13.♕d3 g6 14.a4 b4 15.♕d2 c5 16.a5 ♖b8 17.♔e2 cxd4 18.exd4 ♗d5 19.♕c4 ♗7f6 20.♖d3 ♖d8 21.♕g5 ♗h5 22.♔f1 ♖xh2 23.♕xe7 ♖xe7 24.♕xd5 exd5 25.♗g5 h6 26.♗xf7 ♖h3+ 27.♖g2 ♗f4 0-1 (27) Shoshin,B (2080)-Alekseenko,K (2575) St Petersburg 2017]

### 10.dxc5 ♕xc5 11.♖d1N

[Predecessor: 11.♖g1 b5 12.♕e2 0-0 13.♗e4 ♗xe4 14.fxe4 ♖e7 15.♖c1 ♗d7 16.♕c3 e5 17.♕a5 ♖h4 18.♕f3 ♔h8 19.♔e2 f5 20.♖d5 fxe4 21.♖xe4 ♖e7 22.♖d5 ♕b6 23.♕xb6 ♗xb6 24.♖e4 ♗c4 25.b3 ♗d6 26.♖c6 e4 27.♕h1 ♖f6 28.♖gf1 ♖aa8 29.♖cd1 ♖fd8 30.♕xe4 ♖ac8 31.♖d5 ♗xe4 32.♖xe4 ♖b2+ 33.♔f3 ♖f8+ 34.♔g2 ♖ce8 35.♖b7 ♖f6 36.♖d5 ♖e5 37.♖d6 ♖g5+ 0-1 (37) Zemgalis,E-Brasket,C Milwaukee 1953;

Byrne mentions 11.0-0-0 as a possibility, with white then planning an all-out attack on black's king. But he does note that in that case it is likely that black might not have too much trouble starting his own attack against the white monarch.

Indeed, this is a very important positional point:

If your king has long term safety issues then your only hope, in most cases, is to generate threats against your opponent's king.

Naturally you are familiar with opposite sides castling, too, where the theme is simple --- get thar the fustest with the mostest, and whomever plays "D" first usually loses...]

### 11...♗bd7 12.♕e2!

[Since it is a common refrain from me, let me repeat here again what is development?

Development is getting your pieces to their best squares as effectively and efficiently as possible.

What are the "best squares" for your pieces?

This can be constantly shifting throughout the game! Thus, development is an ongoing process, until the game ends. It is NOT just an opening thing.

The best squares for your pieces are often dictated by the pawn structure, and as the

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structure changes, so should you look at your pieces, and see if they are still where they need to be.

Byrne, here, makes a "GM" move to most players, but, in reality, it is simply a logical 'chess move' dictated by the structure.

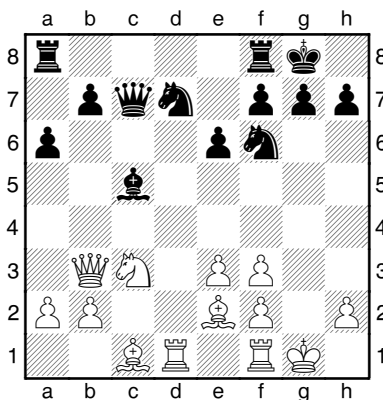
He notes, "That the ♖c4 no longer has a future on the a2–g8 diagonal. Its future home lies on the h1–a8 line, and so it is redeployed."

You might note that his dark squared bishop is best posted on c1. Why then did he move it on move nine?

It is simple, as the ♖a1 was posted poorly, it needed to be on d1. Thus, it was (timing wise) best to get it out of the way then.]

12...0-0 13.0-0 ♖c7 14.♖c1! [Byrne says, "Not 14.f4 e5 15.fxe5 ♖xe5 because it menaces the white king." {See my next note.}]

14...♖aa8



[Possibly a *traditional annotator* might tell you that here both sides have completed their development and it is time for the middle game to start.

Naturally I am not going to tell you that because both sides have not completed their development!

Move 14 was yet another key point, and maybe some might say white undeveloped

his ♖! [Of course, you know better as c1 was its best square all along].

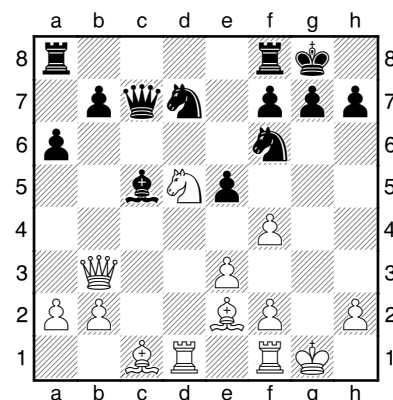
In this case white showed good patience as here is another important "positional maxim":

Before you undertake a committal change in the structure try to get all of your pieces to their best squares first! (now this one doesn't come from me, but I wholeheartedly endorse it.) This is actually a fundamental endgame principle, espoused by many, but especially, Dvoretsky.

If you recall my fundamental definition of "POSITIONAL CHESS" is that one visualizes a future position s/he would like and then 'plays backwards' (and forwards) to see if it can be achieved.

It does not have to be an entire position, but it also could simply be an ideal location for each piece, as it is here. Now, we can go back to move 14 and note that white was not ready for 5th quadrant play. Now he is and he advances f3–f4.]

15.f4 e5! 16.♖d5



16...♖xd5 17.♖xd5 [The point is now seen. I hope the reader now has some appreciation for how this game has been played. These moves have "not been random", but well thought out. The next

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phase of the game is also well-played in the same manner. Pay attention closely and work these out for yourself, too.]

**17...♖fd8!** [Accurately played! (Byrne)]

[17...♖ad8 18.♙f3 hitting the point b7 would force a queen trade and black's hopes for an attack upon white's king would go away. That would leave Black struggling in an inferior endgame. (Yes, he might hold [Of course, Bobby would say, "No way, Jose!"] but it will not be a pleasant day... or task)]

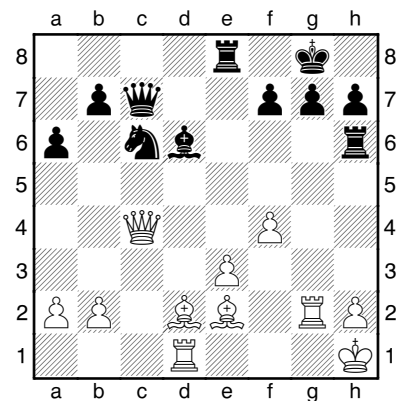
**18.fxe5** [Now 18.♙f3 ♖ab8 [the difference] and black gets the upper hand(!) 19.fxe5 ♘xe5 20.♚e4 ♘xf3+ 21.♚xf3 with his better pieces, better structure, and safer king. Again, maybe not enough to win, but now it is black {not White} playing for two results.]

**18...♗xe5 19.♚e4** [In this next phase: Black wishes to keep both rooks for his attack on the king; White wishes to safeguard his king (note the role that the white squares play as black is missing that bishop). Is that enough for you to understand?

If not, then direct any questions to me at:

[indyfmchess@gmail.com](mailto:indyfmchess@gmail.com)

**19...♖e8 20.♙h1 ♖e6 21.♖g1 ♖ae8  
22.♙d2 ♗c6 23.♚g4 ♖g6 24.♚c4 ♖h6  
25.♖g2 ♙d6 26.f4**



[Byrne says that this ends a phase of the game. He sums up: I have the 2♙'s; My king is safe; I have a 'backward e-pawn'. He could've added that he has long-term pressure upon black's king, a possible passer on the e-file; and, in reality, the initiative.

Black dictated with some threats for a while, but what did he gain from it?

This would be a perfect case of C.J.S. Purdy saying that, "Black tried to attack without first having an advantage. It has failed, and this failure is likely to boomerang on him if his opponent is up to the task!"

Check carefully, the next part is a battle over the 5th quadrant (yet again!).]

**26...b5 27.♚c2 ♚b6** [(Δ♙c5)]

**28.♙f3** [(prepared for ♙c5 with ♖c1 - prophylactic play)]

**28...♙f8** [passive]

**29.♙d5 ♗e7** [29...♗b4? 30.♙xb4 ♙xb4 31.♚b3+-]

**30.♙b3**

[Did you notice?

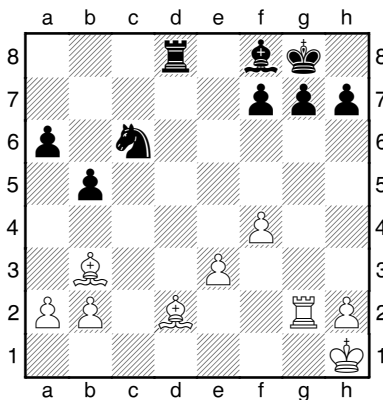
The ♙ had no future on the h1-a8 diagonal, and so was redeployed (dare I say developed) on the a2-g8 line. Naturally the target is f7.]

**30...♖d8 31.♖dg1 ♖g6 32.♚e4 ♖xg2**



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33. ♖xg2 ♔c6 34. ♗xc6 ♘xc6



[All of the attacks on the ♔'s have been defused, the ♗'s traded, and we are left with an endgame where white enjoys the 2♗'s, an unbalanced pawn structure, and two distinct ♖ masses separated by two files...]

If you look back, that may have been mentioned in an earlier note(!) Thus, from a positional sense, white could have envisioned having a "position" like this one and worked towards it.

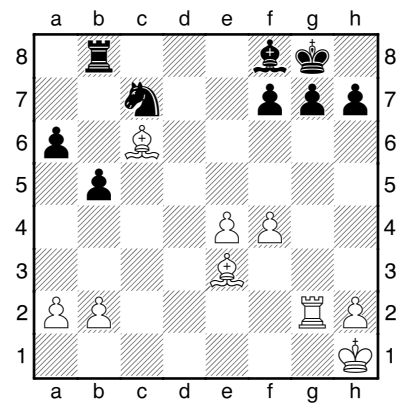
That is the essence of positional chess.]

35. e4 ♘d4 36. ♗d5 ♘e6 37. ♗e3 ♘c7?!

[Missing a chance to activate his "worst" (♗f8) piece. True, he would still be significantly worse, but watch, it is not better to have two bad pieces, rather than one.]

38. ♗b7 ♖b8 [Exchanging ♖'s 38...♖d1+ would leave his queenside pawns to their fate, and at least one would ... "go missing" ...]

39. ♗c6



[In the next part of the game black tries to eliminate all of the queenside pawns. If he can accomplish that then he will have survived.]

39...b4 40. ♗a4 ♘e6 41. ♖c2 ♖d8 42. ♔g2 ♖d3 43. ♗f2 [When it rains, it pours...white adds to his list of edges: a more active king!]

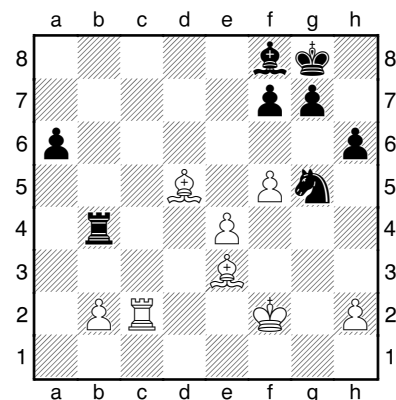
43...h6 44. f5! [Patience! Never miss a chance to make an opponent's piece move to a worse position.]

[44. ♗c6? ♘d4]

44...♘g5 45. ♗c6 b3 46. axb3 ♖xb3 47. ♗d5

[Back to the best square, and cherished diagonal.]

47...♖b4



[From afar Byrne had seen this position.]

48. ♗xg5!!

[His original intention was to sacrifice a ♖]

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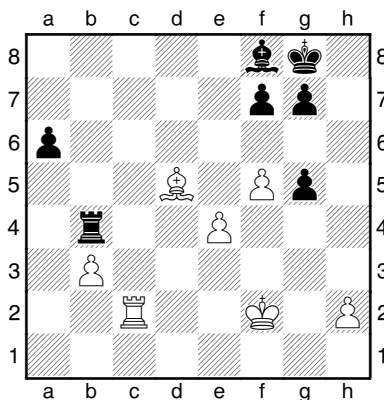
with check(!) for a big bind. 48.♖c8 ♜xb2+ 49.♔g3 ♜b5 50.♞d8;

He also saw 48.e5 ♜b5 49.♞d2 ♘b4 50.♞d1 ♘c5 51.♙xc5 ♜xc5 52.♞d2 and while it looked promising, Black's king could now help with the e-pawn.]

[But a further look, and then he saw the text, and the easily winning game it would give him. The ♙d5 reigns supreme here.

White will have distinct advantages: An extra piece (The ♙f8 is useless); Weak black pawns to prey upon {a6, g5, & especially f7}; A potential queen on the e-file; and possible mating attacks (due to the extra ♔!).]

48...hxg5 49.b3



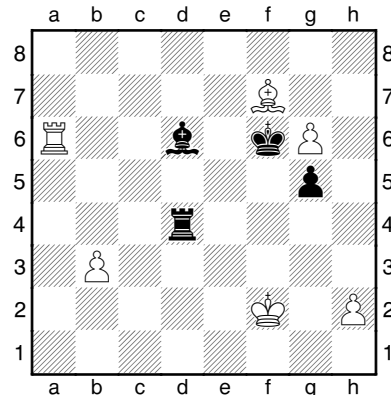
49...♔h7 [49...♞b6 50.♞c7 ♜f6 51.♔g2! ♙d6 52.♞c8+ ♙f8 (52...♔h7 53.♞e8 ♘b4 54.e5 ♜b6 (54...♞xf5 55.♙e4) 55.♙xf7) 53.e5! ♞xf5 54.e6!!+-]

50.♞c8 ♙d6 51.♙xf7 [(Δg6+ and mate)]

51...g6 [51...g4 52.♙g8+ ♔h8 (52...♔h6 53.♞c6 ♞d4 54.♙d5) 53.♙c4+ ♔h7 54.♔g2 a5 55.♞a8 ♙c7 56.f6]

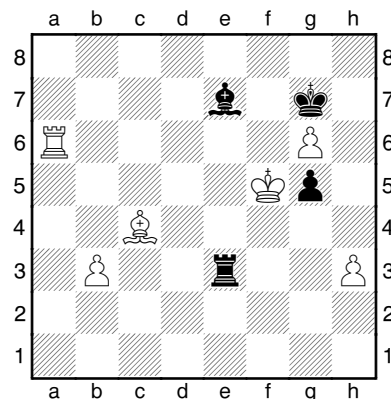
52.fxg6+ ♔g7 53.♞g8+! ♔f6 54.♞a8 ♞xe4

55.♞xa6 ♞d4



[Two widely split pawns equate to an easy win, of course.]

56.♔e3 ♞d1 57.h3 ♔g7 58.♔e4 ♙e7 59.♙c4 ♞e1+ 60.♔f5 ♞e3



[Instead of playing "routinely" to advance the b-pawn, Byrne goes for the jugular.]

61.♞a7! ♔h6 [61...♔f8 62.♞a8+ ♔g7 63.♞g8+ ♔h6 64.♞h8+ ♔g7 65.♞h7+ ♔f8 66.g7+]

62.♙d5! ♞e1 63.♙e4 ♞f1+ 64.♔e6! ♞e1 65.g7! [Naturally 65.♔d5 is good too]

65...♞xe4+ 66.♔d5 1-0

*A game worthy of close study, and an ideal way to learn about endings*

The Western Open, played over the Fourth of July holidays, was a premier event. It was often played in Milwaukee (I played in it on several occasions) and attracted strong fields (even one Robert James Fischer). This was the decisive game in this event. Byrne, the highest seed, placed first with Brasket, a former champion, a clear second just ½ point behind.